

## REMINISCENCES OF AN ELDERLY ENTOMOLOGIST

R. P. DEMUTH\*

I was born in 1907. My parents lived in Edgbaston, a leafy inner suburb of Birmingham. Almost from birth moths fascinated me. There was a story, presumably apocryphal, that I would lean out of my pram and place my finger firmly on the thorax of any pug or carpet foolish enough to be at rest on the adjoining close-boarded garden fence. I certainly did this as soon as I could walk and then placed the corpse in a matchbox. This was considered by my nurse to show sadistic tendencies and the demise of *Xanthorhoe fluctuata* resulted in no jam for tea.

As a dayboy in a preparatory school in Birmingham, I began to collect. That is to say I caught, killed and set insects and pinned them into an old birds egg cabinet my parents gave me. The local collecting ground was Edgbaston Park, a considerable private park and lake which we had permission to visit. All its surroundings were built up for miles around. The Chimney-Sweeper flew commonly over the damp parkland grass and I found a Coxcombe Prominent at rest on a twig, something I have never done since, but my great find was a pair of Poplar Hawks sitting on a reed. I had never seen anything so big and next day at school they caused a gratifying sensation. Further afield there was a disused railway cutting near Frankley. This was alive with Pearl Bordered Fritillaries and there were lots of Bee Hawks dashing around; since I never remember catching any I don't know if Broad or Narrow but I suspect the latter.

It is difficult to realise how common insects were 60 years ago. We went to the New Forest for our holidays. Church Place lies south west of Lyndhurst Road Station. It was a mixed wood with the rides bordered with bramble in full flower. Every bramble in the sun was smothered with Silver Washed Fritillaries and the Gatekeeper, hundreds of each species. The Large Tortoiseshell was also present in smaller numbers but I cannot remember if there was any elm. In all the Forest enclosures the White Admiral was abundant. On one of these holidays I first learnt to sugar. I must have read about it somewhere and persuaded my mother to give me the remains of a tin of treacle which I daubed on the exposed roots of a row of pines growing on a bank at the bottom of the garden where we were staying. After dark I crept out with my bicycle lamp. My treacle was covered with moths, ninety per cent Copper Underwings, jostling to get at the sweets. In contrast, in the year 1981, my wife and I put on four pounds of the finest Fowlers treacle and rum mix in one of the best enclosures and were rewarded with a grand total of four very common moths.

\*Watercombe House, Waterlane, Oakridge, Stroud, Glos. GL6 7PN.

Other holidays were spent with my grandmother who had a little house near the cliff on the east side of Southbourne, out towards Hengistbury Head. Round the house were rough fields waiting development. In most years the Clouded Yellows would track backwards and forwards pursued by me. The sight of *helice* would double my speed!

The great collecting expedition from Southbourne was to go to Ballard Down between Swanage and Studland. If parental consent could be obtained, and my parents mildly disapproved of the time I spent (wasted) on collecting, I would take a tram to Bournemouth Square and run down to the pier from which there were two rival paddle steamer lines to Swanage ("White Funnel steamer leaving first, travel by White Funnel steamer!"). If the sun looked like going in, I would run all the way to Ballard Down. This chalk ridge from Corfe Castle to the sea was something quite outside my earlier collecting experience. The short grass was covered in flowers and the flowers were covered with butterflies. Chalkhill and Adonis Blues were particularly common, so were Marbled Whites and most of the Skippers. I had by then learnt to separate the Lulworth from the Small Skipper and both occurred in plenty. If any additional exercise was required, the pursuit of the Dark Green Fritillary or a male Oak Eggar provided it.

In 1921 I left my preparatory school and went to Charterhouse, a public school near Godalming in Surrey. Kettlewell and Lipscomb were my contemporaries. Cockayne had been there earlier so two-thirds of the R.C.K. were Old Carthusians. Ossy Latter and Cissy Rice were the masters in charge of biology which enshrined the lepidoptera and the latter organised expeditions by bicycle to good collecting spots. Some boys came because they were keen on natural history, others to avoid cricket; I was in both these categories, in fact my cricket was largely spent at long stop or long leg where I could look for caterpillars in the rough grass. Collecting was naturally limited to daylight. Only Kettlewell had the courage to go out by night. This he did in the autumn term by slipping away from the boys as they left their houses for the main school buildings to attend a concert or play and quietly rejoining them as they returned. The intervening two hours would be spent in scouring the Godalming street gas lamps and incidentally adding *plumigera* to the local list. The rest of us had to be satisfied with searching fences and tree trunks, beating for geometridae, pupae digging (lots of Lime Hawks round the trunks of elm trees) and getting caterpillars. The big ones were the popular ones. Broad-bordered Bee Hawks were easy as they were common on the honeysuckle growing over isolated bushes on the Surrey commons and gave themselves away when young by eating little holes down the midrib of the leaf. Poplar, Eyed and Privet Hawks, Emperors, Puss and Kittens, all living

(and mostly dying) in jam jars would be considered a fair assembly for the younger boy.

In 1924 I started keeping a diary and except for a few short gaps and a longer period before and during the war when I was in the Navy, I have kept one ever since. At first it was just a list of insects seen or caught but it soon became more chatty although the spelling was often appalling. By the end of 1925 I was using Latin names and "Silver Washed Frits" became *Dryas paphia*. What I have still to write is based on these diaries.

Here are some extracts from the year 1925 which give the flavour of collecting as noted by an enthusiastic and quite observant schoolboy. Observations in brackets are those of the old man of 1983.

May 14. I noticed a female Brimstone depositing. I collected several of her ova. When depositing two flies were crawling over her wings, but she did not disturb them.

June 4. I went to Newlands Corner (near Guildford). Duke of Burgundy Frits were extraordinarily common but in very bad condition.

June 16. (I give a list of caterpillars I was breeding).  
 December Moth. Unsatisfactory, it is not feeding as it might (but it survived and when it emerged it was a Pale Oak Eggar).  
 Broadbordered Bee Hawks. Eggs to third skin. Growing well.  
 Vapourers. 1st skin. Eating well.  
 Muslins. 1st and 2nd skins. Doing well.  
 Poplar Hawks. Dead.

June 18. Went with Lipscombe to the Hogs Back after the Orange Tailed Clearwing. We found some larvae, thousands of old exit holes but no pupae. We met an entomologist, an oldish man, collecting for his son, a doctor. He told us where to find Small Blues, in a pit on the north side of the Hogs Back, Aldershot end.

June 23. Cut about many Wayfaring trees, finding many old tunnels but nothing fresh. I miss Kettlewell's advice and skill in this as in many other matters. (The brilliance of the man was showing in the boy!)

June 30. Went to the Hogs Back quarry (see June 18). Took 28 Small Blues. They were very common but few were undamaged as it is much too late.

August 1. (Holidays) For the first time in five years I went to Ballard Down, Swanage. The weather was dull with occasional sunshine and a very strong wind. I started to work the little nooks at the base of the downs. I took there 13 Lulworth Skippers, 3 Marble Whites and a few Brown Argus. The Lulworth Skippers were getting over and I took few good specimens. When the sun was in they sat on the grass and wild thyme and refused to fly. If disturbed they ran down into the roots of the grass where they were quite

impossible to see or dislodge. Throughout the whole day I only saw one male, why?

August 6. (On holiday with Kettlewell at Lyndhurst) We started off at eleven in pouring rain down Beechams Lane towards Stubby Copse. Bernard hurling his stick at the tree tops secured 8 Dotted Carpets. At the bottom of the Lane we started beating (list of common insects). At four o'clock luck suddenly changed. I got a full grown Alder Moth larva, Bernard another one skin smaller and I a Lobster half grown, all inside five minutes and all beaten from oak and all from separate trees. It is curious to note how *fagi* prefers the dying, moth-eaten boughs of oak instead of the healthy ones. (Rather unlikely. The female would have had to select the unhealthy branches the previous year when they might then have been healthy.)

Sep. 6 (Queens Bower, New Forest). I beat off oak a full grown *fagi*. The abundance of dead leaves that fall into the tray is a nuisance and *fagi* looked just like one of these and I would have tipped him out, as they don't get a grip at once, if he had not waved his legs at me protestingly.

Sep. 12 (Queens Bower, New Forest). I beat a lot of willows and when I had finished the willows I passed on to the birch and then emptied my tray of larvae again. The first thing I noticed was a Kitten in the middle of the tray lashing its tails. It is now supplied with birch and willow and the proof will be in the eating (*bicuspis* or *furcula*?)

Sept. 14. Kitten will only eat willow (bad luck!)

Oct. 3 (Back at Charterhouse). I went to Loxley Park with Lipscombe where we dug up 12 *tiliae* pupae. Three we unfortunately cut in half. Most came from elm. Little trees with trunks about 1 foot thick are much the more favoured.

Oct. 20. A young boy in my House gave me a *rubiginea* to set, which he had found under a tree. (To be asked by a junior boy to set such a rare and beautiful moth which I had never before seen must have made me madly jealous. To this day I have never seen *rubiginea* at rest in the daytime.)

At the end of each year my diary includes a review of the past twelve months. The high spots of 1925 were the adoption of black pins and the purchase of a Bignall beating tray. I list the pupae I have obtained and that I forced all of them. This was done on a shelf over a radiator in my cubicle and the reason was that I was too impatient to wait for their natural time of emergence and the result was I killed 60% of them.

By 1926 I was a senior boy and school rules were relaxed. One of these rules required the boy on half-holidays to be back in school for a roll call at 5 p.m. so the afternoon was divided into two collecting sessions, somewhere more distant first, say Hankley Common, and a quick rush round the Norney Rough fence after-

wards. This fence was between Peperharrow Park and the mixed wood of Norney Rough and was of vertical slats about six foot high to keep the deer in the park and gave me endless pleasure and a considerable variety of moths including my first *fagi* found at rest. Like most boys, the size of the moth had certain attractions and *roboraria* filled the bill as it was big, fairly common at Norney Rough and at Gatwick Wood nearby, had some variation and sat on tree trunks at a convenient height from the ground.

June 29. I spent an afternoon after *roboraria* and got 10 (5 ♀ 5 ♂), 8 in the Gatwick Woods and 2 at Norney Rough. I could have got more but I had no means of getting more home. They varied considerably in marking and colour from a light grey strongly marked with black to a dark grey with hardly any markings at all. All those at Gatwick were on oak — generally two to a tree but not necessarily male and female; those two from Norney Rough were on pine.

Another source of pleasure were the poplars which stood round Cutmill Ponds. These were medium sized trees with plenty of low projecting branches which could be reached by standing on the saddle of one's bicycle and must have provided me with scores of ova and larvae. For instance on June 9 I found larvae spun up between leaves which my diary described at length but without noting that they were two separate species, for on July 22nd *subtusa* emerged and the rest appeared in the spring as *Orthosia populeti*.

At the end of July 1926 I left school and though today it is unfashionable to admit that I enjoyed it, I did in fact do so. Charterhouse was a reasonably civilized place and my mania for catching moths was looked on as a pleasing eccentricity. Though I was no good at games I could run faster than anyone else and this was a quality that easily outweighed being a bughunter.

Immediately after I returned home I went to stay in the New Forest with Bernard Kettlewell whose parents were there on holiday. As soon as breakfast was over we would set out with our beating trays; as soon as supper was over we would set out with our tins of sugar.

July 29. In the morning we went again down Beechams Lane. I beat 2 more *trimacula*, 1 *coryli*, 2 *duplaris*. On bramble in a ride towards Stubby Copse I found 1 *alni* in its last skin. It was highly conspicuous curled up on the top of a leaf of a long bramble trailer. I saw 3 *valezina* which is common in the Forest this year. In the evening we went onto the moors and set up the moth trap and a sheet but we had a blank night. (What the moth trap consisted of I cannot remember.)

July 30. On an apple trunk in a cottage garden where we asked for water, Bernard found a newly-emerged ♀ *monacha* sitting on its pupa case. On the return Bernard found on a birch spray a very fine full fed *alni* larva not far from where I found mine. In the



evening we took the *monacha* ♀ to Beechams Lane and set up three lights there. Over 20 ♂ *monacha* came to light and they were arriving fast when we left; in addition we took 6 *jubata*, *lichenaria*, *duplaris* and many others. (About those lights: I am not certain what we used. At some time I started using a paraffin lamp but I also used an acetylene bicycle lamp with the top removed. This produced an effective blue/white light but the naked flame could incinerate the catch.)

July 31. In the evening we went to sugar in Hurst Hill (the traditional, No. 1 New Forest sugaring enclosure) where we found that objectionable man Strickland had sugared about 100 trees and left us six. We got nothing and I don't think he did either. (I don't suppose there was anything objectionable about Mr. Strickland, except that he had beaten us to it. In 1926 there were numerous collectors working in the New Forest including some resident professionals. There was a pub about half-a-mile out of Lyndhurst on the left of the Brockenhurst road where entomologists met in the evening to pick up information. Just behind the pub there was a ride with the most sugared oaks in England, sugared by those who had drunk well and could go no further!)

For the first three weeks of August I was staying with a school friend in Wicklow, the first of the great number of visits I have paid to Ireland, but I did little collecting. I saw a few *stellatarum* on the sea shore and I found one specimen on the handle of the guards van of the Dublin train where, as it was quite sleepy, it must have been for the journey.

I travelled considerable distances on my Sunbeam Oilbath bicycle (with back pedalling brake, so if you pushed the bike backwards the wheels locked solid) on the rough roads, sometimes up to 80 miles in a day. In the early twenties only the Southampton — Lyndhurst — Christchurch road was tarmac and all the remaining Forest roads were gravel. Not all this mileage would be by human effort. I would wait for an oncoming lorry or charabanc, accelerate and catch hold of any projecting part and be towed for miles. It sounds and probably was dangerous but the speed was not much more than fifteen miles an hour.

September 22. On such an expedition, to sketch and without a net, I stopped for a picnic at a wood in the very isolated area between Fordingbridge and Martin and found myself surrounded by *c-album*. Though most butterflies have become sadly more scarce, *c-album* has done the reverse and in 1926 was both scarce and local and here was I with them all round me but netless. They were mostly flying in a rough field alongside the wood and resting on scabious or overripe blackberries and with my hat I knocked down a few, returning on subsequent days to take a series. On one day Alan Druitt took me in his car. He was a Christchurch solicitor and had what seemed to me then a wonderful collection. He only

had one leg but was remarkably nimble, especially when *c-album* was in sight. As a reward for showing him the place he gave me a short series of Cornish *arion*. How times have changed!

October 6. Bernard (Kettlewell) took me to a place in West Bournemouth where *hispidus* (now *oditis*) was very common a few nights back, both sitting on marram grass and around the gas standards. There were quite a few out tonight sitting on the grasses and one had only just hatched (8 p.m.) as its wings were quite limp. On the front of a gas lamp we found an *exigua* and on a stem of marram grass Bernard found a *fluviata*. (The locality referred to was on sand dunes at Sandbanks facing in to Poole Harbour. I have taken *hispidus* at other localities but this was the only sand dune one I know and the interesting thing is that these *hispidus*, which I have still got, are conspicuously more marked with yellow and generally lighter in colour. I have made several return visits with the sand dunes reduced in area and no sign of *hispidus*. The *fluviata* (now *obstipata*) became the parent of a huge family which for several generations flourished in the sub-tropical greenhouse of Cambridge University Botanical Gardens.)

(To be continued)

ELAPHRUS ULIGINOSUS FABRICIUS (COL.: CARABIDAE) IN SUSSEX. — On 22 April 1984, I took a single *Elaphrus* at the edge of a small pond in Arundel Park. It was the only specimen of the genus that I found, and it was running on mud under herbage at the edge of an almost dry pond at the western edge of the park near the River Rother. It much resembled *E. cupreus* Duftschmid but on examination later proved to be the very local *E. uliginosus*. Moore (*Ent. Gazette*, 1957, 8: 171-172) records *E. uliginosus* from various southern counties excepting Sussex and Kent. This appears to be the first record of this species in Sussex. — RICHARD JONES, 29 Dean Road, Willesden Green, London NW2 5AB.

LARVAE OF CUCULLIA VERBASCI L. FEEDING ON BUDDLEIA DAVIDII ON THE ISLAND OF STEEP HOLM. — On 16 June 1984 I found six second to third instar larvae of *Cucullia verbasci* feeding on the leaves of a *Buddleia davidii* bush on the island of Steep Holm in the Bristol Channel. This represents an additional spot on the map (*Ent. Rec.* 96: 49-51). The normal food-plants of *C. verbasci* are members of the Scrophulariaceae, chiefly *Verbascum* spp. Since Steep Holm is well isolated from the mainland, this possibly represents a food-plant switch which has occurred independently to what is happening on mainland Britain. *C. verbasci* has previously been recorded on Steep Holm (*Steep Holm: a case history in the study of evolution* by the Kenneth Allsop Memorial Trust and John Fowles, 1978), but whether the island population is truly isolated or whether immigrants sometimes arrive from the mainland is not known. — DENIS F. OWEN, 66 Scraftoft Lane, Leicester.